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ABSTRACT

This journal is intended for teachers of reading on the two-year college level. Articles included in this issue are: "A Competency Based Approach to College Reading Improvement Programs," "Drumming Up Trade for College Reading Programs," "Instructional Techniques for Developmental Reading," "College Reading W.A.R." (on the image of college reading classes), "An Accessible But Overlooked College Teaching Resource," and "A Modest Proposal: The Use of Humor as a Motivational and Instructional Tool." (MAI)

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[Reading at a Two-Year College]

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CONTENTS

Page

Meet SIG's Treasurer, Jane Higdon 4

"A Competency Based Approach to College Reading Improvement Programs" 5
Raymond F. Morgan, Victor I. Culver

"Drumming Up Trade for College Reading Programs" 12
Dorothy Merchant

"Instructional Techniques for Developmental Reading" 16
William J. McNeill, Betty S. Griffin

"College Reading W.A.R.*: A Declaration" 22
Allan R. Maar

"An Accessible But Overlooked College Teaching Resource" 37
Irwin B. Bergman

"A Modest Proposal: The Use of Humor as a Motivational and Instructional Tool" 39
Shirley Aaronson

Application for SIG Membership 47

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Jane's professional and community affiliations are numerous, including IRA, American Association of University Professors, and the Birmingham Regional Planning Commission. Her doctoral studies currently do not permit her to indulge in her hobbies of horseback riding, gardening, and poetry writing.

Jane is the mother of an eight year old daughter and a four year old son.

A Competency Based Approach to College Reading Improvement Programs

Raymond F. Morgan and
Victor I. Culver
Old Dominion University

Background: Two Types of Measurement

Two types of measurements are typically used in diagnosis and assessment of college reading and study skills programs. The focal point in norm-referenced measurement is the norm group, a sample for whom essential characteristics is known. Scores most commonly reported with norm-referenced measurement are percentile ranks, grade equivalents, age equivalents, standard scores, and stanines. The major advantage of norm-referenced measures is that they tell how well a student's achievement compares with students in the norm group.

Criterion-referenced measurement is designed to determine what behavior a student possesses at the time the test is administered. The reference system is the skill or ability reflected in the test or test items. Competency scores on criterion-referenced tests reflect minimal percentages of items that a student must successfully accomplish before he is considered to have mastered the referenced skill. Therefore the main focus in criterion-referenced testing concerns the behaviors the student actually possesses.

Criterion-references and norm-referenced measurement can be used to assess the same skills, and both systems can provide important information about the success of the instructional program. The primary difference in the two, however, is that each reference system provides different information to the teacher and evaluator. Administrators frequently choose between the two systems, and the choice often reflects pragmatic objectives of the program.

It is the premise of the authors that, in developing a competency-based system of instruction in the community college or university developmental studies program, careful consideration must be given to both aspects of measurement described above. Historically, there has been more norm-referenced measurement than criterion-referenced measurement; thus the actual skills and abilities of those students involved have usually remained unspecified. A knowledge of specific skill abilities can provide a better indication of instructional requirements and thereby permit a more efficient control of the learning process.

Overview of the Reading Improvement Program

At Old Dominion University in Norfolk, Virginia, about 700 students enroll each year in four reading improvement courses specifically designed to meet their needs by providing them with competencies necessary to perform adequately in college. Students enroll in the

program because: (a) they made a low verbal entrance examination score, (b) they are marginal students enrolled in a special developmental program called the Academic Opportunity Program (about 250 students are in this category) or, (3) they elected to take the course.

Students are diagnosed and placed, depending on weaknesses discovered, into one or two of four skill area courses that have been established in reading. Students who are found to be deficient in more than one skill area are assigned to a three-credit-hour, one semester, general reading efficiency course. Students who are deficient in rate are assigned to Rate Development and Flexibility, a one-semester-hour course designed to develop flexibility in approached to different reading tasks. Two other one-credit-hour courses, Vocabulary Development and Spelling, and Systems for Study: Developing Study Skills, aid students who have specific skill weaknesses in these more narrowly defined areas.

Competencies for Students

Table I lists the areas of competence in which students must demonstrate their proficiency. Also listed are criteria used to determine the degree of competency extant. Students in each of the four courses are made expressly aware of their strength and deficiency areas through the use of profile sheets provided by the instructor after the testing.

Table 1

Competencies

Performance Criterion Raw Scores

Area		
Reading		
Reading Rate & Comprehension	13	McGraw-Hill Basic Skills System, Reading
Skimming & Scanning	19	
Paragraph Comprehension	20	
Spelling	31	McGraw-Hill Basic Skills System, Spelling
Vocabulary	29	McGraw-Hill Basic Skills System, Vocabulary
Study Skills		
Problem Solving	8	McGraw-Hill Basic Skills System, Study Skills
Underlining	5	
Library Information	11	
Study Skills	11	
Attitudes	45	Estes Attitude Scale
Attendance	90	Punctuality, Good Attendance

The Course of Study

In each of the four courses instructors aid students in meeting necessary minimum competency levels. In the three-semester-hour general reading improvement course, global approaches to better reading comprehension are stressed, e.g., SQ3R and Directed Reading Thinking Activities. Students become familiar with purpose setting and the adjustment of rate to purpose. Instructors provide study guides to teach college content area vocabulary concepts. Students also learn how to keep adequate records and progress charts, keep a daily log of activities, and to make better use of their study time and to improve study habits. Students also learn to recognize that books are organized and patterned in certain ways. They learn how to take notes through the two-columned note-taking system and how to better organize and categorize their thoughts while studying a text.

In each of the three mini-courses, students concentrate on their diagnosed weakness area for five weeks of intensive study. In all four classes, alternate form post-tests are administered in only those areas where students demonstrated weakness.

Summary

The major points have been presented concerning a college reading improvement program in which assessment components have moved from a norm-referenced to a

criterion-referenced system. The result is a program where skill competencies are assessed and, on the basis of skill strengths and weaknesses, students are assigned to one or more of four reading courses specifically designed to facilitate skill development. Since this is only the second year of such a competency-based program, changes and improvements are constantly being made to improve both assessment and instruction. Specific data demonstrating the efficacy of this approach to programming with respect to improvement in grade point average is not yet available. However, one example of the impact of such a program lies in the area of student approval and attitude, a long-standing problem source related to this kind of program. Under the norm-referenced system of reading improvement at Old Dominion University, there was one general reading improvement course with a pre- and post-test using a standardized reading achievement test (Nelson-Denny Reading Test). Students' approval rating of this course was 40 percent. The new competency-based courses have received an average student approval rating of 86 percent. Certainly there are other criteria for judging the effect of a program. However, by all indications presently available, the competency-based system described herein has been most successful.

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Drumming Up Trade for College Reading Programs

Dorothy Merchant
Cuyahoga Community College

Many students entering college today need help in basic reading skills if they are to successfully complete their desired courses of study. You know it. Their other professors know it. Even they know it! In fact, they know it better than everybody. However, in their haste to get through college as fast as possible they frequently bypass the help made available through college reading programs. Why?

When asked this question they offer various explanations. They don't have time. They can't afford it. They need a course that will transfer to a four year school or they are insulted that you should even suggest that they need a remedial course!

Based upon in-put from the students they work with, most personnel affiliated with college reading programs feel that the courses they offer are indeed helpful and if they are followed students will be able to get more out of what they read. In short, they feel that they can offer some solutions to the reading problems apparent in college classrooms. Yet in spite of the great need, these courses traditionally have small enrollments. How then do you go about getting the problem (the student with a reading handicap) and the solution (the reading program) together?

Institutions have tried various methods to entice students. Some offer college credit for developmental and/or remedial reading courses. Others make attendance compulsory for specified segments of their student population. While compulsory attendance is successful in increasing enrollments it sometimes generates negative feelings on the part of the student. Offering credit likewise helps to entice students, but they are often students who are looking for an easy three hours credit, not students who come out of a sincere desire for self improvement. Are we back to where we began---students who need help and helpful programs that need students? Not quite. There is a way to stop this cycle. In fact there are several rather inexpensive things that can be done.

Before you begin to spread the good news there are several things that must be done. Essentially what you must do is sell the program. Therefore, it is important that you believe in the product you are selling. Be sure that your objectives are clear, your resources adequate, and your system for keeping track of each student's progress simple, but complete.

Decide realistically the number of students your program can accomodate and who they should be. Line-up and train some volunteer help if your present staff is not sufficient. It is important that you are able to deliver on any claims that you make so that your advance

preparation must be handled thoroughly and systematically. Then roll up your sleeves and go to work.

If you can't get Mohammed to the mountain...(or the students to the reading lab), take the program to the students. Go to classes where the students are. Tell them what you have to offer. These services may include: various types of self assessment, tutors to help with various subjects, taped lectures of other courses, help with study skills, or study guides from other courses. Present a chapter from the student's textbook to demonstrate various study techniques. Don't stop there.

"Wangle" invitations to counselor's meetings and to department meetings. Let them know what you are about. Ask them for suggestions on how you might best get the word out about all of the services available.

Utilize media as much as possible. It will help prevent "battle fatigue" on your part and serve as another medium of getting out the word. A video tape of interviews with students telling how the program has helped them might be placed in the area where students register. Use the student newspaper. Once again personal testimonies of the program's worth by students could be particularly effective.

Conduct tours of your facility during faculty in-service meetings or as part of the orientation for new students. Invite classes to observe your program in operation.

Put flyers on cars in the student parking lot, posters in the bookstore, the cafeteria and maybe even in the restrooms.

Finding the time to do all of these things and still perform your required duties can be a real problem. You may wish to investigate the possibilities in your institution of released time to work on this project, or the availability of special funds for special projects. Extra pay won't buy you any time, but it will at least help to pay for some of the coffee you'll consume before the project is completed. If this is not possible, you might work out some sort of team teaching arrangement with a colleague that frees you up for a few hours a day or a day or two each week.

The investment in time and energy has a far reaching, long lasting payoff. Students are prepared to get more from the courses they take, and they can do so with less frustration. But students are not the only ones who benefit when reading programs are utilized by students. Satisfied, successful students are less likely to drop out so the College benefits.

Instructors are not frustrated in their efforts to use printed material as an effective tool of instruction because the students can read. The institution is providing the skills that are necessary to succeed. All of society benefits when people can function more efficiently.

Instructional Techniques for Developmental Reading

William J. McNeill
Betty S. Griffin
Spartanburg Methodist College

Since fall semester 1974, Spartanburg Methodist College, Spartanburg, South Carolina, has conducted a special communications semester for selected freshmen. Freshmen are selected on the basis of SAT verbal scores and high school standing. One hundred and fifty students are selected for the program; students may opt not to enter the program. Class size is limited to 21.

Since inception, the program has gone through numerous revisions. Presently, students placed in the program are required to attend five hours per week (for three hours credit) in English fundamentals combination classroom writing laboratory and review of grammar; three semester hours of general psychology; three semester hours of oral communication; and, as the cornerstone of the program, five hours per week (for three hours credit) instruction in reading. This latter course is entitled "Reading for Comprehension I", and the course--fully transferrable--counts as an elective toward graduation requirements.

This paper focuses on the reading instruction of the communications program at Spartanburg Methodist College. Specifically, this paper describes those strategies and methodologies that have worked for us in engaging all

students in developing reading independence, regardless of competency level at beginning of semester. Even streamed classes exhibit a diversity of students--diverse in preparation, and in motivation. The fundamental challenge of the reading instructor is to deal effectively with this diversity, providing meaninful instruction to non-readers and to students reading at the 14-plus grade level.

Students take the Nelson-Denny Reading Test (Form A) during the first week of the semester. Although we have used the Iowa Test of Silent Reading and the California Achievement Tests, we still find that the Nelson-Denny Test provides accurate and usable data (grade levels and percentile rank) as to where each student is reading at the beginning of the course. Locally prepared tests and reading inventories help locate specific reading disabilities early in the semester.

Students are introduced to SRA Reading Laboratory during first and second weeks. During the third week students are introduced to controlled reading (EDL). The key to management of the classroom is developing multiple strategies to meet the need of all students. Those students able to function independently of the instructor are encouraged to do so. The principal tasks in developing activities for students at independent level are: identifying, and developing, areas of interest on an individual basis (detective fiction, ethnic

literature, gothic tales, etc.); assigning, suggesting readings; and obtaining feedback from students at the end of class periods. The important thing again: keep the student occupied with a meaningful and pleasurable (for the student) encounter with printed material. As a result of his experiences in the reading class, the student at the independent level should develop a desire to continue independent reading after the semester is finished.

This management technique frees the instructor to work more directly, intensely on a one-to-one basis with the non-reader and with the marginal student. These students, the ones most dependent on an instructor, need to experience success very early. An oral reading by the instructor can serve the purpose of building confidence, improving self-concept of the underachieving student. Select a story that is brief, one that can be read in one or two class meetings. (Examples: Ambrose Bierce's "The Boarded Window"; Robert Penn Warren's "Blackberry Winter.") The purpose of this technique is to train the student in identifying setting - geographical and time; discovering sequence of events and predicting outcomes. The non-reader and the marginal reader can predict outcomes, locate significant facts, etc., as easily as better prepared students.

A variety of techniques can be developed by the instructor to guide the non-reader in building

confidence. (Again, self-concept is important.) One productive technique: have the student read into a cassette recorder a short story or fable, one deliberately selected because of simplicity and low readability level (Example: a Hans Christian Andersen fairy tale). After the student has read the story aloud, have him write a response to and a summary of what happened in the story. During playback of the cassette recording, the instructor can assist the student in locating errors (substitutions, deletions, additions, inversions, etc.)--errors likely to interfere with comprehension during silent reading.

The important thing about class management is: all students should be engaged throughout the 50-minute class sessions in a meaningful, pleasureable interaction with printed material. Students should be pressed to become independent from the instructor. Students are encouraged to select own reading materials. The instructor provides guidance, not prescriptions.

The physical design of the classroom should contribute to management of reading instruction. At Spartanburg Methodist College, a recent addition to the library (learning resource center) contains classroom space for all reading classes. There are twenty individual study carrels placed side-to-side around three sides of the room. Students sit in carrels with back to the instructor. A small office space in one corner

of the room (soundproof and two-way glass) permits students to work on individual readings without disturbing or being disturbed by the remainder of the class. Occasionally, students working on independent reading projects may work upstairs in the library. These students return to the class for short discussions when completed with reading projects.

During the final two weeks of the semester, post-tests and individual conferences are arranged to advise the student on progress during the semester. The Nelson-Denny Tests (Form B) and the Iowa Test of Silent Reading are the two pre-tests and post-test measures of reading improving. In analyzing levels of reading development, we have found the percentile rank increases (or decreases) to be more useful than grade level in ascertaining progress. Small reading gains may be reflected in percentile increases and may be obscured in grade levels.

Class attendnace is generally good, despite only three unexcused cuts for the semester. Previously the course was offered for developmental (non-transferrable) credit only. The decision to award credit for the course has improved class attendance immensely. Our experience has been that students, especially students most in need of developmental reading courses, simply are not going to recognize own reading inadequacies and volunteer to spend three, four hours per week (or whatever) for a course that

does not carry credit.

The Spartanburg Methodist College communications program is no nostrum for equipping all students with essential skills for successful college experience. The reading program does offer hope of leading some students to that larder of subjects and ideas, the LIBRARY-LEARNING RESOURCE CENTER.

College Reading W.A.R.*: A Declaration

Allan R. Maar
Lansing Community College

Ethic for an Unsung Minority:

Somewhere from the dim recollections of my past I recall an ethic that conditioned me to believe that "the meek shall inherit the earth." But the older I become, the more serious are my doubts. I am beginning to suspect that this maxim was devised and perpetrated by the "unmeek" to keep the meek subjugated, or at least "in their place" for the time being. Certainly, from the vantage point of a Meek, as long as a shred of hope exists to someday INHERIT THE EARTH, the status quo somehow seems more palatable. But Oh, it's a waiting game.

The question is, how long in a short lifetime is one expected to wait? There comes a time when the "put off" becomes intolerable and is overcome by impatience and indignation. And now is one of those times, a time for uprising. Why not? I seem women asserting themselves all around me. They're even opening doors for men nowadays. You see what the world is coming to! In the face of such untoward aggression, I believe the moment has arrived for the most downtrodden minority of all to band together and assert itself. I speak, of course, of College Reading Teachers.

*W.A.R. -- Warrants Academic Respectability

The Image Problem:

We have meekly sat back for years and accepted second class status on the academic roster. Teachers of literature have sneered at us as though we held tarnished credentials. Instructors of humanities have looked down upon us as if we have infiltrated from a social agency and were not, indeed legitimate faculty members of an "academic institution."

Perhaps this state of affairs is partly our own fault. Maybe we have not kept up with an inflationary age in which garbage persons are no longer garbage persons but "sanitary engineers" and janitors are regally dubbed "custodians." After all, even at the college level a reading teacher is just a reading teacher -- and this often membled with downcast eyes.

Not so with the instructors of all the so-called "basics." In elementary school we learned Reading, 'Riting & 'Rithmetic. Have you noticed what happened to the 'Riting and 'Rithmetic teachers in transition to the college level? The 'Riting teacher metamorphosed into the Instructor of Composition and Thetoric. Even more impressive, the 'Rithmetic teacher transmogrified into the Professor of Mathematics. Is it any wonder we're not holding our own? Can it be that defeat lies in our very adherence to abject simplicity? Perhaps we have become so brainwashed, we have begun to doubt the dignity of our own profession. Should we, for example, have

become "Preceptors of Language Processing," or perhaps, "Facilitators of Communication Decoding?" But the name itself is a minor consideration. It is merely a superficial symptom. We must penetrate to the heart of the problem.

The matter at hand is how to improve the IMAGE of the college reading teacher. And more important, the image of the college reading program. And believe you me, it is ROTTEN. IT HAS REACHED "THE PITS."

The Primitive Perception of College Reading that Prevails:

In the first place, the pursuit of teaching mature students to read is perceived as totally lacking dignity according to many a lay person and even those teaching in the subject matter disciplines. "If they can't read by the time they get to college, they shouldn't be here." How many times have you heard that, even from those whom you might expect to know better? Reading, poor waif of a subject that it is, is taken for granted. It is lackey of the basic skills and continues without recognition or honor to toil quietly in the background performing menial tasks, like Cinderella, while the ugly stepsisters glory in the prestigious finery acquired as they grew older and became academically respectable. Is it doomed? Will it ever be rescued?

Perhaps there is dim hope. Recent equal opportunity practices of many institutions have realized that the only way to increase their quotas of minority students is

to accept those whose reading skills are woefully basic. Further, as enrollments decrease, admissions offices, so I'm told, somewhat relax their rigid standards.

Even so, classes in reading remain low profile and are often held in remote basement rooms or abandoned air raid shelters, elevator shafts, or bank vaults.

To be sure, reading courses have been offered for years in major institutions. They have often been illegitimate relatives forced upon one department or another--rejected, cast aside, and rarely recognized as equal.

Little wonder: it is a bitter pill for a state legislator to swallow when millions of dollars have been spent on reading programs in elementary and secondary schools, and still it is necessary to offer courses in reading at the college level.

A Rational View of College Reading to Promote:

With all due respect, however, I submit that this attitude is not sequitur. It is totally beside the point. What may or may not have happened before a student enrolls for a course in an "open door" institution of higher learning is immaterial and irrelevant. It is the commitment of that institution to teaching the individual there and then beginning with his/her skill level. Constantly looking backward at a system that failed to hit the target is not only painful but pointless.

Attitudinal Change Comes First:

But perhaps it is an approach to the system itself that needs realignment, or maybe a major attitudinal change is in order.

Let's just for a moment imagine that each entrant into the educational system bears an academic bucket which he is obliged to fill with officially approved ingredients in order to become a "bona fide" graduate of secondary school.

Most educators agree that there should be some flexibility in a child's curriculum and that the child himself should have some choice in his studies. In part this should be dictated by the child's interests, talents, and skill achievement. So potentially the bucket might be filled with a dipperful of arithmetic and a pinch of geography for one child, while another would toss into his bucket a liter of civics and a tablespoon of physical education. But the additions in each case are acknowledged as valid and contributive to his overall education. It is highly unlikely that any two students would approach the high school administrators responsible for granting diplomas holding buckets with chemically identical contents, but if all the ingredients in each bucket were from the approved list, both would be legitimately certifiable, both equally worthy.

Let's suppose further that the choice of "ingredients" was so wide that a student could fill his bucket without

including any course in "reading." Should he not then be able to acquire this subject without penalty at the college level, at a time of motivation, sophistication, and realization of its necessity for survival. Indeed he should. Yet this is not the case. How, for example, would this differ from the student who does not elect to pour foreign language skills into his bucket before college, but is encouraged to start from scratch with basic Fench or Spanish at the college level, and those courses fully accredited. Or perhaps he has learned a foreign language in high school and takes a comprehensive test in college to add four or five credits toward his degree program. By this logic it should be equally fair to provide a comprehensive reading test which upon passing would contribute equivalent credit.

Insane idea? Perhaps. No less mad, however, than the way institutions of higher learning make the college reading student suffer and pay for what he innocently left out of his bucket. College reading classes are covertly referred to as "Remedial" -- shame! They are spoken of uncomfortably in hushed tones and whispers. And this in the face of the already extreme sensitivity of the non-reader who has with agony discovered his enormous deficiency, and has already reached the acute distress threshold.

<u>The Failure Stereotype Cycle</u>:

How does this affect the student who has failed for years

because of his/her deficiency and wants to start anew in college? Well to begin with, it is definitely not a boost to the old morale. It suggests that the institution attaches very little value or credence to this program. In many places this opinion is not unfounded. Likewise, it is often interpreted that a reading deficiency is equated by the institution with a parallel shortcoming in intelligence. A student signing up for a basic reading course is branded. He has hit the bottom, the dumping ground. He is marked as the lowest of the low. His status is subzero. Not only is he forced to put a calculus book jacket on his reading text to conceal his enrollment in the "highly suspect" course, but he must take an extra heavy class load to make up for the time and credits he is "losing" by enrolling in reading in the first place.

Is it any wonder that survival is perilous? The student has been dealt a stacked deck practically guaranteeing his academic doom. If all this is in the name of equal opportunity, another chance, and a square shake, then give me treachery but at least with fair warning. How seriously can the student take his reading course, especially if he has enrolled additionally in three or four "credit" courses necessary to make him a full-time student? His reading course is the first to hit the dust when the assignment pressure of the other courses begins to set in.

A Redefinition of College Reading:

Now why exactly is a class in reading at the college level such a black sheep? I suspect that it may stem from a basic misconception of the word itself-Reading. We are told that up to the third grade or so a child learns to read. After that he reads to learn. This idea seems to be widely accepted. Inherent in it is the notion that reading as a process is entirely one dimensional with no successive levels of accomplishment. Either one reads or one does not -- how simple. On the other hand, writing, excuse me, Composition/Rhetoric - is multidimensional with many levels of subtlety. The college encoder is capable of amazing nuance, brilliant innuendo, and all manner of wondrous figurative language. But, alas, the reader, dullard that he is, must reach his pinnacle by graduation from third grade or perish. From this point on the Dark Ages have begun and the student enters a void. Reading at an advanced level is only academically sanctioned once again when the subject matter dealt with is positioned categorically under the aegis of Literature or the Humanities.

Victory Lies in Credit:

Needless to say, many educators and administrators are not familiar with the hierarchical nature of the reading process, which is certainly a point in itself on behalf of the continuation of reading instruction beyond the third grade. Indeed, reading programs are more mastery

defined than courses in many other subjects, and yet ironically are penalized as a result of this very refinement.

But the unkindest cut of all is that these courses in reading, courses basic to survival in our adult society, are listed as No Credit. Is there any better way to damn a course, to question its validity, its legitimacy, than this? It was all right for credit in elementary, middle school, and high school, but somehow it lost its potency in college. Does this suggest that reading becomes less important the more mature we become?

But if this is not enough, if one accepts the premise that reading is a reasonably important skill, then what about the multitude of high school graduates in whom a grave absence of reading skill is evident?

How many high school graduates cannot typewrite (a skill), take shorthand (a skill), play a musical instrument (a skill), perform gymnastic tricks (a skill), swim (a skill), speak a foreign language (a skill) .... The list is endless. These are all pursuits that for one reason or another escaped the bucket mentioned earlier. And yet we give <u>legitimate</u> college credit for courses in business skills, courses in musical skills, courses in physical education, courses in foreign language, and some schools even give credit for marching band in which the musical skill has already been mastered. The credits then, are presumably awarded for the marching which had already

been perfected, at least to some degree, before the third grade. And speaking of skills and credit, it is not at all viewed as illegal that many skill-mastery courses, in addition to foreign language, that have been completed in high school are repeated or "comped" for credit in college, and no one seems to contend that this is wrong or even devious. Only reading is singled out and discriminated against.

Michigan State University continues even now to wrestle with these problems. From the minutes of the Academic Council meeting of November 2, 1976, under Recommendations on Remedial Courses comes this motion:

> No credits earned in remedial courses shall be counted toward graduation. Credit earned in all remedial courses are to be included in the calculation of the GPA and MAPS.

In the ensuing discussion the Council discovers that a "remedial course" has no clear cut identity and, indeed, a "definition does not exist at this moment."

Further, quoting from the MSU Academic Council minutes:

> A second issue related to the fairness of charging students for credits which they could not cound toward graduation. Professor Gerald R. Miller stated that it is mythology to contend that credits are an intellectual exchange. The truth is that they are an economic exchange and that therefore the counting of a few credits of remedial work toward graduation would in no way reduce the value of the degree or of the learning attached to that degree...

An enlightened if not revolutionary minority attitude to say the least.

The original motion? It was defeated - for the moment anyway or until somebody defines "remedial." Of course, there are those in whose jaded opinions any course taken to eliminate a deficiency or remedy an academic weakness is "remedial." It has always been difficult to understand the mystique surrounding course "worthiness" and "merit." It's the old image problem back to haunt us again. It is, moreover, doubly perplexing to realize that only with the advent of commercial speed reading courses have college developmental courses acquired some small measure of respectability. What reading teachers could not accomplish, business promotions and high tuitions have managed to do. The economic consideration rears its head again. It is another sad commentary on our society that the greater the cost, the higher the perceived value. Of course, most institutions have wisely taken advantage of the publicity generated by the commerical concerns, but this is not enough.

Battle Strategies in the Quest for Respectability:

Higher education must absolutely establish the legitimacy of a requisite series of reading courses based on rational and logical reasoning. Such a program should reflect not an ill-defined proliferation of courses but levels of sophistication reflecting the needs of the student population.

It should, moreover, realistically establish a

criterion-based time frame necessary for the student at the lowest skill level to reach his desired goal. If a student in nineteen years has achieved the fourth grade reading level, it is absurd to believe that anyone could think that he might magically achieve college skill level with a one or two term course. And there is no reason to apologize for the time it takes either. Since when did reading become anything other than a complex skill?

If ever a reading program is to become academically respectable, credit, legitimate transferrable college credit, must be assigned to the reading offerings -- courses needed by a large percentage of the college population. Certainly, if it must, the credit can be of the elective variety, and to be sure the amount of elective credit acceptable for any given program must follow reasonable guidelines. But to deny the skill-disadvantaged student, whose academic advancement must be proportionately greater than any other in college, the merest shred of positive reinforcement is, in many cases, to assure his discouragement and ultimate defeat.

It is not alone the severely skill-disadvantaged student who suffers. Consider also the situation of the average eighteen year old college freshman whose parents are paying dearly, often sacrificing, to provide him/her with a college degree.

The following is an almost verbatim quotation from a student explaining why he could not enroll in the

reading program:

> I really need a course in reading. I'm pretty fast already but my concentration is awful. Of course, I guess I read everything the same - at the same speed I mean.
>
> My biggest problem is knowing how to get into the text books. I like to read, but some of the stuff is so dull.
>
> I've thought about taking a reading course, in fact I wanted to sign up, but my dad had a fit. You see, it's no credit. And if it's going to hold me back, I mean slow me down as far as graduation goes, he said, 'Forget it.' His point of view is not to waste time, and money, on no credit nonsense.

Well, how does one combat that kind of rebuttal? The ironies are once again evident. Can the reading teacher control the frustrations? Credit seems to be the key, and no amount of rational argument makes any difference on a mind so "made up."

Further, when I speak of the skill-disadvantaged student, I am not referring to any insignificant minority. In many two-year institutions the student with reading skills below the seventh grade level touch ten percent. Likewise, as much as one-third of the student population is reading below the tenth grade level. It is unreasonable not to recognize reading as an academically respectable pursuit when the mass need is so great.

If those who pay lip service to the importance of reading as a survival skill are unwilling to acknowledge its academic respectability by awarding appropriate credit to students who have painstakingly fulfilled the rigorous

requirements of reading courses and for once in their lives have conquered the complexities of the mystical language decoding process, they had best keep their lips sealed.

In point of fact, there is little chance that a student entering a two-year college, reading at grade level three or below would ever be inclined or satisfied to receive a baccalaureate degree made up solely of "Reading" credits even assuming they were available. Our academic system is so riddled with safeguards, backup systems, and bureaucratic hurdles, that should this somehow occur, remote as its chances might be, I cannot help but believe the degree would be deserved.

A Time to Rally for the Cause:

That is just how assertive I have become, a new conditioning by causes of the "70's." Small wonder that apothegm about "the meek" is losing credence. Who wants to inherit the earth anyway -- in its present state? And where are the Meek of old, anyhow? The adage is tarnished with age and has lost its thrust. It is wise to forget it and forge ahead.

A new cause has begun to blaze on the horizon--a cause worthy of conflict! College Reading WARRANTS ACADEMIC RESPECTABILITY. If you subscribe to this standard, promote it; fit for it, but expect conflict in the offing. And, if it's an adage that's needed to replace the old one, delete "meek" and substitute "righteous," all the while bearing in mind that "the righteous are bold!"

AN ACCESSIBLE BUT OVERLOOKED COLLEGE TEACHING RESOURCE

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Along with various other courses given at colleges and universities, college reading and study skills courses receive and sometimes probably deserve the criticism that their curricula are not relevant to the needs of the students. More specifically, reading and study skills courses are belittled by some on the grounds that the skills are taught in isolation and are not transferred by students to content area courses and to other areas outside of school where reading also takes place.

One learning tool which can be used effectively to at least partially overcome this objection is the college catalogue. Several positive characteristics of most catalogues are immediately apparent and make it an attractive learning resource for classroom use: it is readily available, it is free, and it contains practical and useful information to some degree for every student, regardless of his or her curriculum major and field of interest.

A student in a college reading and study skills course who perceives that the teacher is using a learning tool which can help resolve important personal questions and needs, is less likely to exhibit the apathy and even resentment which some display when they learn that they are required to take the course, in some cases without

academic credit being granted.

The college reading and study skills teacher will find many portions of a typical catalogue can be successfully utilized and integrated into a course of study. A few specific ways which the catalogue can be used successfully to illustrate concepts and skills presented are:

1. Surveying: Use of the catalogue's table of contents, important headings, sub-headings, illustrations and index.

2. Vocabulary Building: Words and terms which college students should know and understand, but frequently do not, are found in college catalogues. Some examples: prerequisite, corequisite, curriculum, matriculation, elective, etc.

3. Noting Details: Listings of course descriptions, degree requirements, etc.

4. Following Directions: Registration procedures, how to determine grade-point averages, how to apply for work-study programs, scholarships, financial aid, etc.

These are just a few examples of ways the college catalogue can be used to develop student interest and skills in a college reading class.

It is, of course, by no means being suggested here that the catalogue be utilized as the sole or even a major reading resource in the class. It is felt, however, that the catalogue can be successfully used by the imaginative teacher at selected points during the semester as an important adjunct tool in arousing the motivation and stimulating the learning abilities of students in our college reading and study skills classrooms

A Modest Proposal: The Use of Humor as a Motivational and Instructional Tool

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In the search for alternative techniques for reading improvement courses, the resource most often overlooked is the use of humor. Perhaps humor has been considered too frivolous, but I think humor as an instructional resource tool has a number of advantages: it spotlights the vagaries of language which produce humorous effects; it is economical and relatively abundant.

The proper use of humor is helpful to the teacher, to the students, and in improving group dynamics. The teacher stands to benefit because it reduces the authoritarian role and eases the task of explanation. Selected jokes are an educational short-cut because the punchline can be used to focus on the particular concept being taught in juxtaposition to the details. Humor can act as a safety-valve, a tension-releaser and as a motivational force.

Although humor has been researched and explored extensively, no universal theory has emerged. Theories are based on physiological, psychoanalytical, philosophical, cognitive-perceptual, and socio-linguistic factors. Each theory is like the six blind men and the elephant "who were all partly in the right and all in the wrong." W.C. Fields has said, "I know what makes them laugh, but trying to get your hands on the why of it is

like trying to get an eel out of a tub of water" (Levine, 1969). As an educator interested in using humor as a motivational and instructional tool, the most meaningful approach seems to be the socio-linguistic because of the concern with language and the belief that "the language system is a major determinant of what is funny in a society" (Hertzler, 1970).

Interestingly, Freud anticipated socio-linguistic thinking because of his interest in language and the tricks it plays. Freud believed that "words were plastic and could be molded into any shape" (1938) and in his book, Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious , he provided many examples of wit which included play with word order, condensations, double entendres, and puns (1938). The following two examples are representative:

> A doctor was examining a patient and said to the husband,
> "I do not like her looks."
> The husband replied, "I haven't liked her looks for a long time."

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> "Did you take a bath?"
> "How is that," replied the other, "Is one missing?"

If you didn't laugh at those examples, don't despair. We don't all laugh at the same joke because there are many factors which affect receptivity including sex, intelligence, personality, age, ethnicity, socio-economic level, geography, level of education and sophistication with words. The relationship between laughter and the

level of language sophistication can be observed in every day situations. As would seem reasonable, those students who are more adept with language seem better able to perceive incongruities, puns, and double entendres. I have used the same joke with different classes and the responses have been quite different.

Humor can be found in various forms of media: literary, which includes satire and parodies; pictorial, which includes cartoons, pictures, caricatures and comics, audio-visual, which includes tapes, television and filmstrips.

Surface and deep structure

Jokes are structured in many ways and therefore do not derive from a simple formula. Some jokes can be perceived on many levels. According to Frank Smith, "the reader's direction of information processing goes from the surface structure of the written symbol to the deep structure of meaning" (1973). In that way, humor can serve as a bridge to generate an appreciation of the deeper structure of language. The following joke can be easily processed on the surface level; the deeper level takes a little longer.

What is the difference between capitalism and communism?

Under communism, it's dog eat dog.

Under capitalism, it's just the reverse.

Many students in reading courses need practice in the following areas: semantics, contextual clues,

organizational patterns, reading flexibility, and critical reading. To illustrate the feasibility of the use of humor to teach those skills, the following representative jokes have been culled from a variety of sources and were selected for their brevity and relevance.

Context and semantics

There is a wealth of material which achieves comic effects by relying on exaggeration, subtleties, levels of meaning and double entendres as generated by language. Our funny chords are struck by the ridiculous or deeper meanings nestled in the flow of language.

Double entendres:

"I shot an elephant in my pajamas", claims Groucho Marx. "How he got there, I'll never know."

Samuel Goldwyn is reported to have said, "Anyone who goes to a psychiatrist should have his head examined."

Sleeping outdoors cures insomnia: sleeping indoors helps too.

Multiple meanings:

Is anyone here yet? (up until the present time)
Don't go yet. (so soon)
We'll get there yet. (time remaining)
Yet, further triumphs to come. (in addition)
It's good, yet it could be improved. (nevertheless)

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She's been shot and the bullet is in her yet.
What's her yet?

Euphemisms:

I know a lot about economics and it's all so simple.
When you lay off the school custodian -- it's a budget crisis.
When you lay off the school crossing guard -- it's a slump.
When you lay off the school secretary -- it's a recession.
But when you lay me off, a teacher -- it's a depression.

Homonyms:

How did a man get out a solid, completely sealed house, with nothing in it but himself and a table, in the middle of a forest? He rubbed his hands until they were sore. Then he proceeded to saw the table in half. Two halves make a whole. He crawled through the hole, shouted until he was hoarse and galloped away.

Context:

Dick Gregory has said that his family was so impoverished that when he had to buy shoelaces, he could only buy one at a time.

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Gracie Allen would often talk about her uncle who was so eccentric, he would put a paper bag over his head and then walk around asking, "where's everybody?"

****

What is a phenomenon?

If you were to see a bird---that's not a phenomenon.
If you were to see a cow---that's not a phenomenon.
If you were to see a tree---that's not a phenomenon.
But if you were to see a cow sitting in a tree, singing like a bird, that's a phenomenon.

Comparison pattern

The perception of the comparison pattern is enhanced by transitional words such as "on the other hand", "but", "however". Similarly, in the rendition of jokes, these words are used to perform the same function, which is to convey differences or similarities. Laughter erupts because of either the truth or absurdity of the comparison.

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My stingy uncle had two friends over and they discussed how they allotted money to religion.
First his friend Joe started, "What I do is draw an imaginary line -- whatever falls on the right side is God's and whatever falls on the left side -- is mine".
However, his other friend, Mike said, "What I do is to throw the money up in the air. Whatever comes up heads in God's; whatever comes down tails is mine".
But my stingy uncle said, "I throw the money up in the air also, but whatever stays up -- is God's; whatever comes down, is mine!"

Inferences

Some things turn out to be funny if we make the wrong inference or use facts incorrectly. Often it is the result of having an expectation reduced to nothing, or as the cognitive perceptualists would interpret it -- making a bad deduction.

The role-play described below works best in class with the participation of volunteers.

A customer who could speak no English walks into a hardware store. First he signals to the salesman to get his attention and then he bangs on the

counter to indicate that he wants nails. The salesman misinterprets and brings him a hammer instead. The foreigner tries again, but this time to simulates the position and motion of the fingers holding a nail and hammer in place. "Aha" says the salesman and brings him nails. The customer is satisfied and then leaves.

Moments later a blind customer walks in and wants to order.

The instructor then asks the student, "Can you show the class how he ordered scissors?"
(student most always falls into a trap by making a motion with the fingers)

At which point the instructor says, "No, silly. He used his voice and asked for it!"

****

Adjusting rate to purpose

Do most students read their texts at the same rate that they read the backs of cereal boxes? Perhaps that is too cynical a question, but there is evidence that many students are locked into one rate of speed.

A dramatic way to introduce the rationale for establishing reading rate is to have different groups of students in the same class read the same anecdotal material for distinctly different purposes; students then compare their findings. For maximum effect, the anecdote should be about a famous person, loaded with details and including a good punch-line.

The first group scans the anecdote to check for one specific detail; the second group skims to ascertain whether the anecdote includes material which reflect the character of the person; the third group is charged

with repeating the anecdote verbatim to the class.

This exercise never fails to convince students that study-type reading is very different from skimming or casual reading. The first two groups generally finish quickly, whereas the last group takes much longer as they struggle to transfer the plethora or detail into their long-term memories. Frequently there are ripples of laughter as their strain becomes more and more noticeable. This anecdotal approach for teaching reading flexibility is described fully in the workbook, Tactics in Reading III, (1967).

Conclusion

Selected varieties of humor can be used to introduce and reinforce reading skills in such areas as use of context, semantics, contrasting patterns of organization, inferences, and adjusting rate to purpose. There is no shortage of sources of humor. In addition to anthologies, cartoon strips and magazines, it is also worthwhile to trade jokes with colleagues and students. Consciousness-raising about the value and pleasure of using humor can reduce inhibitions and increase sensitivity to its use as a learning dynamic.

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